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ABSTRACT

A committee was formed to examine the need for and the possible approach to foreign language instruction for International Business and International Relations students at St. Mary's University (San Antonio). Research literature of most interest to the committee described specific courses and programs in higher education, different formats ranging from mini-course to intensive semester programs abroad, and the activities of the sponsoring departments. In the course of their study the committee encountered some major problems. For example, there was resistance on the part of Business School professors to a language requirement, and on the part of the language professors to a switch from literature-oriented courses to business career-oriented language programs. There were problems with adding required courses to the Business Administration curriculum, and resistance on the part of many south Texas students to consider international business other than trade between the United States and Mexico. The committee recommended a language requirement of intermediate competency for all International Business majors and encouraged all business students to study foreign languages. It proposed the establishment of special sections of the elementary and intermediate language courses for business students and a consideration of the possibility of offering content courses in foreign languages. A selected annotated bibliography is appended. (Author/AMH)

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THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMPONENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS DEGREE PROGRAM

or

INTERDISCIPLINARY COOPERATION BETWEEN THE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND THE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

A paper presented at the November 1981 Annual Meeting of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Denver, Colorado.

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International Business Degrees

A survey made in 1981 by Lee Nehrt entitled "Cue Studies of Internationalization of the Business School Curriculum" Sponsored by the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business has revealed that, throughout the United States, there is a trend toward the establishment of courses of study in International Business. Most of these programs are being developed at the undergraduate level since International Business at the Master's (M. B. A.) level has been alive and well for quite some time. Some of these new international curricula have become major areas of study themselves while others are concentrations within the management major. The AACSB reports that, although the majority of schools offering majors or concentrations in International Business do not require that the student take a foreign language or culture sequence, a number of programs do specify that the sutdent demonstrate proficiency in a foreign language in order to obtain a degree in International Business.

This trend has significant implications for the foreign language teaching profession, especially for members of foreign language departments in Schools of Arts and Sciences. This is so because Business School faculty and students, as well as the business community at large, are becoming aware of the "foreign language gap" demonstrated by graduates of Business School programs in general, and of International Business programs in particular. The idea that certain business students have innate abilities to deal with foreign languages and cultures while others do not is no longer in vogue. Business Schools are

beginning to realize their responsibility in preparing students for the International Business studies.

The guru of American management thought, Dr. Peter Drucker, dramatically pointed this out in his recent comment that there is no longer an American automobile industry, but only a world collection of goods and services that modern business executives and technicians must deal in.

Additional probing of corporate attitudes toward the need for International Business degree programs was undertaken by Carter and McGlosben in their 1980 needs assessment for the University of Houston at Clear Lake City. The researchers polled 500 members of the Houston World Trade Association requesting their advice on several areas relevant to the establishment of an International Business major. The open ended questionnaire brought 108 responses from businesses in the Houston area -- the number one port area in the United States. Ninety responses confirmed the need for an International Business major. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of respondents answered the question on the need for a foreign language with approval of a foreign language in the course of study. Spanish and French were cited most often as languages that business students should become at least moderately proficient in. German, Japanese, Arabic, and Chinese were also suggested by the business community. Foreign language study was considered important for understanding and relating to the other party in a business transaction. While they did not expect every person to be able to conduct the fine details of transactions in a foreign language, those answering the questionnaire

expressed the belief that a moderately proficient command of foreign language would go far in promoting friendship and trust with a foreign client or supplier.

Language and Business at St. Mary's University

In response to these developments in the international business field St. Mary's University decided to revise its International Business degree program. Funding was provided as part of the university's S. D. I. P. Title III award of federal funds. Under the terms of the grant a committee was formed to examine all aspects of the International Business majors with particular attention to the need for and possible approaches to foreign language instruction for students majoring in this area.

As part of its activities, the committee conducted a search of the literature or career related foreign language programs and queried the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business on what its member schools were doing in this area.

After examining the data the committee was both encouraged and discouraged. Encouraged because excellent model career related foreign language programs are functioning at many colleges and universities, notably at Northern Illinois University, at Eastern Michigan University, and at the University of South Carolina. Discouraged because we realized that, although the committee was ready to design a comprehensive program our institution -- faculty and administration -- was not ready for such a completely new undertaking, either financially or attitudinally. Some of the attitudinal problems we encountered were:

A. Resistance on the part of the Business School professors, even International Business teachers to a language study requirement.

B. Resistance on the part of some language professors to switch from literature oriented to business career oriented language programs.

C. Difficulty in adding required courses to the undergraduate (or graduate) Business Administration curriculum since the program is a "heavy" one with few electives.

D. Reluctance on the part of many South Texas students to consider international business other than that of retail trade between the U.S. and Mexico.

With our financial and other limitations in mind the committee recommended a transitional program including the following provisions for foreign language study.

1. Institute an intermediate foreign language proficiency requirement for all International Business majors.
2. Encourage all business majors to take foreign language electives.
3. Develop special sections of elementary and intermediate French and Spanish for International Business students so that appropriate vocabulary and situations be stressed.
4. Continue to teach foreign language in an up-to-date situational context with information on many French and Spanish speaking countries -- not only Mexico and France.
5. Modify existing or develop new foreign language courses to reflect a concern for foreign language as a career skill.

As a result of these recommendations

A. The upper division French civilization course will be taught in the Spring of 1982 with a new emphasis -- shifting from a historical and fine arts approach to a study of political, social, and financial institutions in contemporary french life.

B. An upper division course in commerical French is planned for Fall 1983.

C. A Spanish course called Principles of Oral Communication will be reinstated -- This course teaches public speaking, conversation, and interview techniques in Spanish.

D. Upper division language courses will be developed around selected problems and issues of worldwide concern -- e. g. energy, terrorism, the arms race.

E. Economics 2302 -- Principles of Economics taught in Spanish was offered in Fall 1981 and will be offered again in Spring of 1982. This course will be our first content course (out of the foreign language department) to be offered in Spanish at the University.

F. A $10,000 purchase of library materials, print and non-print, including multi-media kits and cassette sets, was made to support the foreign language/foreign culture component of the International Business program.

G. Finally, the committee initiated two surveys : The first queries recent graduates about their need for foreign languages in their work. The second questions South Texas employers concerning their need for employees with foreign language knowledge. The results of these two surveys will be disseminated to the university community. It is hoped

that these results will serve to reinforce the recommendations of the committee.

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Description of intensive courses and programs. Advantages and disadvantages of this type of instruction.

Fryer, T.B. Foreign Language and Business. New Orleans, 1975. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 125 278)

The Masters Degree in International Business Program at the University of South Carolina, begun in June 1974, has as its unique feature the emphasis on "lifelong experience." This emphasis affects both the student and the department. From the first year of the program (the basic features of which are intensive training in language, culture, and business, as well as internship abroad), students are exposed to facts of life relating to foreign language, culture, and business.

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Characteristics of corporate language training programs and policies, and the role of translation and interpreting were studied. Of particular interest was the extent to which language requirements and language training are included in corporate planning. Also investigated was the extent to which occupationally oriented special purpose language training is included in the language training provided to corporate employees.

Knodel, A.J. & others. Descriptions of selected career-related college language courses. Foreign Language Annals, 1977, 10(3), 311-320.

Seven courses or programs at different colleges emphasizing specific career applications of languages are described. They include: Technical French; Spanish for Law Enforcement and Correctional Personnel; Executive German; Proyecto Desarrollo Economico; Spanish for Medical Professions; Elements of Foreign Language, and Business French and Business Spanish.

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An investigation of current bilingual employment opportunities in the target area through a 6 month survey of local classified advertising: an average of 151 bilingual want-ads were published weekly, 70% of which were in the Business Relations and Clerical work categories. Spanish, French, and German were named most frequently of eleven languages sought.

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Survey by language and by title of bilingual want-ads in The New York Times.

Reschke, C. Let's increase, not reduce, foreign language offerings. Bulletin of the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages, 1978, 9(4), 41-44.

Surveys of college students have been conducted to determine their needs for foreign language study. Students desired career-oriented foreign language programs that meet their professional needs. As a result of the surveys, the University of Houston will offer language courses in German oriented to hotel majors, business majors and opera singers.

Savell, D.P. Foreign languages and "Help-Wanted": A survey of advertisements. Foreign Language Annals, 1978, 22, 77-79.

A survey of 360 "Positions Available" advertisements in The Wall Street Journal shows that there is a demand in the business and commercial world for persons with business, technical, or scientific training who can speak one or more foreign languages.

Ristau, R.A. & Muller, B. Foreign language and business administration: A winning combination. Business Education Forum, 1980, 35(3), 3-5.

The expansion of foreign investments in the United States prompted Eastern Michigan University to develop a new curriculum in business French. The program leads to a major in business French and to the Diploma of Commercial French offered by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Paris.

Thimmesch, N. Our shocking illiteracy in foreign languages. Reader's Digest, February, 1981, pp. 175-80.

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What are they teaching in the B-schools? Business Week November 10, 1980, pp. 61-65,

Discussion of need to add an international dimension to the B.B.A. and M.B.A. degree programs.

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